

examined, and defined, but it can be done. However, when someone commits a crime that gets that person in prison, and they are placed in prison with other people who have similar weaknesses of personality or ideology, whatever it might be, then it is for the good of all the public, and should be considered a very reasonable approach. Not only to maintain peace in prisons so that we don't have riots, but to attempt to rehabilitate these people so that when they come back in the streets we don't have the high level of recidivism that we have. I would like to take three or four prisons and run these programs for a period of time. I would verify what kind of percentages we are getting compared to what they usually get in the general prison population. I think it would be very revealing and positive to do this and I am hoping to get a program started soon. My wife (she is part Iroquois, part Algonquin) and I are very concerned about alcoholism among the American Indians on the reservations. I think that we can put tribal music over the subliminal message not to drink so much, and help the Indians.

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IV: Maybe you are right, although I am still fascinated with your activities in criminology and a bit skeptical and careful regarding your subliminal message program. I believe those who are interested in either or in both, can contact you directly: Ron Nolan, P.O. Box 750, Clayton, CA 94517. Thank you very much for your time.

Note: Ron Nolan's attempts at using psi in criminology were also discussed by Dr. Jeffrey Mishlove in his paper, "Psionics: The Practical Application of Psi," presented at the Thirty-third Annual International Conference of the Parapsychology Foundation (New Orleans, Louisiana, August 1984). Proceedings of the conference, entitled Current Trends in Psi Research, are planned to be published in the fall of 1985. An edited version of Dr. Mishlove's paper has also been published in the Fall 1984 issue of Applied Psi 2046 Clement Street, San Francisco, CA 94121).

Since we have received many questions concerning "psychic" (mental) healing and other alternative healing techniques, we have decided to present a cross-cultural review of folk healing around the world. The interview below answer at least some of these questions. - Ed.

Folk Healers in Italy

Interview with Dr. Paola Giovetti
Modena, Italy

During my extensive travels in Italy I have met a number of contemporary "psychic" (mental) healers who often call themselves "pranotherapists." Their practice usually includes known elements of laying-on of hands, "bioenergy influence," and color healing. After becoming acquainted with these practices, I became deeply interested in Italian folk healing traditions and approached the well known Italian researcher Dr. Paola Giovetti with the following questions. - Ed.

Are folk healing traditions still alive in Italy?

During the past 3 years I inquired about our so-called "country healers" on a journey through rural Italy looking for old magic-religious traditions. When I started this journey I did not hope to find much material, but in every region I easily encountered several healers, meaning that these traditions have not disappeared, but are still alive and active.

In other words, these rituals and faiths do not survive only in the memory of a few people, but on the contrary they are still important, even if their present value is different from the past. Formerly these practices were often the only medicine, because, at least in the countryside, other medicines did not exist. Today the sanitary situation is very different, but people still go to the country healers, even to an increasing degree.

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The reasons for this increase are several: first of all, the dissatisfaction with official medicine, which led people to turn to alternatives; second, a need for the sacred and magical which modern society feels more and more and is substantially the necessity to believe in something; and finally, the growing necessity for open, warm, and generous encounters, with human participation and cordiality. The "magical" country healers satisfy all these necessities with their evocative rituals, which act deeply at a psychosomatic level, so that it is not absurd to think that the study of popular medicine could provide useful stimulations for official treatments.

What is popular medicine and who are country healers?

The question must be answered at both historical and social levels: popular medicine refers to a stratified society, wherein the country people adopted health defenses different from those used by other social classes. Popular medicine has nothing, or nearly nothing, to do with official medicine, first of all because its basic principles are magical and ritualistic. Popular medicine locates the causes of illnesses in elements which are external to the sick person (possession, evil eye, witchcraft, even intervention by the devil), so that in order to regain harmony one must use adequate, i.e., magic/religious, rituals.

Magic is also present in the numerous preventive therapies of popular medicine: amulets, remedies against the evil eye or witchcraft, etc. For both diagnosis and therapy we must consider the intervention of probable paranormal effects produced by the healer, who often, without knowing it, is a psychic and psychotherapist. The use of herbalistic methods, which are again appreciated, must also be mentioned.

When I began this research, I thought I would find the phenomenon much more widespread in the South than in the North of Italy, but the situation I found was not like that: healers are numerous in every part of Italy, and they have many "clients." Moreover, the rituals are fundamentally similar throughout Italy, in spite of the great differences between the regions where they are working.

What methods and rituals do folk healers use?

The magic rituals and techniques still surviving in Italy are surely very old: our country healer is not very different from the shaman of the so-called primitive populations of Asia and Africa, who is both priest and healer. This is true because nobody thinks that the therapeutic function could be separated from the religious, i.e., from the contact with a Supreme Being, who is able to free us from illness and possession.

The therapeutic rituals I have found in our country are very old and probably date back to pagan times, with a later superimposition of Christian names and rituals. Country healers, in fact, use magic gestures while at the same time invoking Catholic saints and using the sign of the cross. The cross is a typical, recurrent peculiarity of their therapeutic action. All of these healers "sign" the sick part with the cross, repeating it at least 3 times (3 is a magic number which appears again and again). Moreover, the healers use particular rituals, which are quite varied. Materials they use are common: flowers, rice, wheat, water and salt, wine, tree branches, bread-leaven, oil, and so on - normal, every-day ingredients which receive a special meaning through the ritual.

The intervention is substantially magical. Near Naples the old healer Maria Servita, in order to heal a swollen spleen, cuts off a piece from the bark of a walnut tree corresponding to the form of the feet of the sick person. When she then lets it dry up near the fire, without knowing it, she does a typical ritual of magic. She is truly convinced that while the rind dries and wrinkles up, the swollen spleen gets smaller and smaller until it becomes normal again.

Or we can consider the numerous therapies against warts I have found everywhere: a healer of Sardinia, Palmero Roi, takes a reed, ties the same number of knots as the person has warts, makes his crosses, prays, and then burns it. He is convinced, together with his "patient," that while the reed decays, the warts disappear as well. While the operation takes about 40 days.

Again in Sardinia I have found the same kind of magic ritual against sciatica: the healer Angelina transmits,

with a special ritual, the sciatica of her patients to a branch of wild fig tree and then she burns it - burning the sciatica together with the branch. She can do her ritual only during the waning moon, which lets illnesses recede, not with the waxing moon, which causes them to increase.

Nearly all healers sign the "evil eye," which is believed to be responsible for many different diseases and misfortunes. The most common ritual is this one: in a dish with some fresh water, the healer places a few drops of olive oil. If the drops disintegrate when falling into the water instead of remaining round, it means that the person is a victim of the "evil eye." In this case, after many prayers and signs, the ritual must be repeated until the drops remain round.

How does a person becomes a healer?

Fundamentally in two ways: one can be born a healer, or he/she can be given this capacity. In the first case one must be born "with the shirt," i.e., having the amniotic sac on. This "being born dressed" is considered a particularly lucky circumstance, which makes the baby able to become a healer. Also the seventh is destined to become a healer: the 7th of seven sisters or the 7th of seven brothers. And in some regions, even a premature child of seven months.

In most cases the capacity for healing is given by an old healer to a person who is considered suitable. The initiation ritual always happens on Christmas Eve (24 to 25 December), the magic night, and consists in the transmission of rituals, words, and signs. The new healer must have certain peculiarities: he (or she) must believe in this kind of healing, and must be generous and wish to follow the tradition. He (or she) must keep the words which are to be said during the ritual a secret; as a matter of fact, these words must not be revealed to anybody lest they lose their power.

Not one of these healers asks for money: they may eventually accept some little gifts, but they are happy with nothing. Healing people is not usually their job, and they have another vocation. They heal if they are asked to and they cannot refuse to heal.

An important aspect is the faith: all healers think it is very important to really believe in what they do. They generally are very religious persons and think it is important that the patient also believes in the possibility of becoming healthy and prays during the treatment. Of course, this faith has great importance.

What kind of illness do the folk healers heal?

They are "specialized" and heal some little but annoying diseases: warts, St. Anthony's fire (erysipelas), sties, sprains, burns, vermination, sciatica, rheumatic pains. One of the most typical cases is St. Anthony's fire, a very painful illness which resists medication. In country I have often found medical doctors who send their patients to the healers to "sign" the fire, because fire, without this ritual, would go on spreading.

It is impossible to discuss all the practices Italian country healers in a brief interview. With material from this research, I wrote a book I guaritori della campagna (Rome: Edizione Mediterranee, 1984), where practices and rituals are described in detail.

I'd like to emphasize some general aspects. A typical feature of all these healers is their optimism, their generosity and force. They are certainly individuals with a special charisma, who can help people in many ways: with their rituals and by encouraging them, cheering them up, infusing them with hope and confidence. I am convinced that many of them are psychics possessing psychokinetic abilities.

This sense of life, this human warmth, this capacity to reach deep emotional levels, is what today many medical doctors are missing. These aspects also recommend the study of this phenomenon to the experts. The study of popular medicine, in addition to its historical, social, and anthropological interest, can be helpful for the medical profession and can help medical science to make further qualitative leaps.

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